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A
S E R M O N

PREACHED IN THE
Cathedral and Metropolitcal Church of Christ,
CANTERBURY,

On FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 1780.

B E I N G
The DAY APPOINTED to be OBSERVED
AS A DAY OF
GENERAL FASTING AND HUMILIATION.

By the Honourable and Reverend
JAMES CORNWALLIS, LL. D.
DEAN OF CANTERBURY.

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И. О. М. Р. Е. С.

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JOB XII. 23.

HE INCREASETH THE NATIONS, AND DESTROYETH
THEM; HE ENLARGETH THE NATIONS, AND STRAI-
TENETH THEM AGAIN.

THAT empires are subject to great changes,
and to reverses of situation, is undeniable;
but much controversy hath arisen in exa-
mining the causes, to which these revolutions are to
be attributed; whether solely to the natural course
and order of things, or to a super-intending provi-
dence. The former supposition is neither agreeable to
the dictates of REASON, nor to the general conduct of

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mankind recorded in PROFANE HISTORY, nor to REVELATION; whilst the latter receives strength and support from a reference to these several standards.

It must be agreeable to the dictates of REASON, that there should be a divine interference in human affairs. We must suppose, that he, who formed us after so exquisite, so wonderful a manner, formed us for some very wise and excellent purpose: that this purpose could not be a subserviency to the will of any created beings in this world, as man is evidently placed in the most exalted station in it; but was such as required the agency of man toward its completion.

Now, if this be granted, we can scarcely be led to think, that our creator would not retain a superintendency during the execution of a plan, so evidently important in itself, and agreeable to its Author. And this superintendency must be active: otherwise it would
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be useless, were it confined solely to observation ; without producing any effects, adapted to remove the obstacles, and to apply the salutary helps to the grand design. Indeed, to suppose him without this active providence, would be to derogate from his wisdom, as it would be to suppose him not taking the only effectual means to produce the success of his views ; and from his goodness, as the happiness of his creatures depends upon it.

It requires then surely no great exertion of our reason to discover, that the Author of our being not only is thoroughly acquainted with human affairs, but that he effectually interposes in the administration of them ; since his existence necessarily implies his governing providence. It is not, however, always so easy to comprehend the workings of this great principle. In some instances, they are not appa-

rent to us; we only see the effect without tracing the operation of second causes; in others, they are discernible only to the attentive observer, who makes a proper use of his reasoning faculties; whilst in others, they are open and notorious, so that all are enabled to say, 'this hath God done, and to know his work.'--But he surely is justified in all his ways.

These conclusions appear with additional weight, in considering states and empires. Did God not 'increase the nations, and destroy them,' did he not 'enlarge the nations, and straiten them again;' there would be no encouragement to such as fulfil the divine intentions, or discouragement to those that oppose them. The reward or punishment of a nation can only be in its present state, that of individuals may and must be likewise in a future one. But it will perhaps be urged, that the individuals, of whom a
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nation is composed, may be rewarded or punished hereafter for their actions, as political, as well as moral agents. A little reflection, however, suggests to us, that this mode of reward and punishment cannot be relied upon. It is not adequate to the magnitude of the evil intended to be restrained, nor can it be so conducive to general reformation, as immediate exertion. And although it must be owned, that the blessings bestowed on communities are too often disregarded by them, yet it is certain, that national calamities have always a great and extensive effect. They awaken the attention of millions, and have a natural tendency to produce a serious disposition of mind, the only vehicle, in which a successful remedy for vicious inclinations can be applied.

THIS great truth, the existence of a national providence, is farther confirmed by the general conduct
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of mankind, recorded in PROFANE HISTORY. We there find, that the Gentile, as well as the Jew, the Heathen as well as the Christian, ever had recourse to propitiatory rites and prayers in times of public danger. But whence these propitiatory rites; whence these prayers; if there did not always exist an inward consciousness of a Deity, to whom it appertained 'to increase and enlarge,' or to 'straiten and destroy?' And as this has been the conduct, not of any particular state or nation, but of all; not of any particular age, but of every one; it cannot be ascribed to the accidental warmth of enthusiastic zeal: the operations of enthusiasm are irregular and uncertain, those of natural reason, more especially when applied to the successive actions of communities, regular and equal. Besides, the ablest philosophers discovered the same sensations. When the great Roman orator endeavoured to animate the people to oppose the machinations

tions of Catiline, he arranged every virtue on the side of the commonwealth, and every vice on that of the conspirators ; and then added, ‘ In a contention of this kind, should we not be sufficient of ourselves ; should human exertions be found inadequate ; will not the immortal Gods compel so many and such enormous vices to yield to such admirable and excellent virtues ? ’ Can there be a stronger declaration in favour of a providence, of an active providence, protecting virtue and discouraging vice ? And we may surely discover in it the real sentiments of this great philosopher ; since we here find a doctrine, which he hath often maintained in his other writings, expressed with uncommon beauty and energy. The situation of Rome too was at that period critical : It was not a time for uncertain arguments ; or inconclusive rhetoric : It was not his business, as the patron of so just and important a cause, to suggest problematical questions to his audience, but to meet and heighten every legitimate idea, as it was rising in their breasts.

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WE may therefore conclude it to have been his opinion, that there is an active superintending deity (for the use of the word Gods in the plural number was only in conformity to local language and custom, and does not at all affect the argument) we may conclude it, I say, to have been his opinion, that there is an active superintending deity, and possessed also of moral attributes ; that virtue is the foundation of public happiness ; and that the practice of moral goodness gives stability to the freedom and civil privileges of a country.

IT may naturally be asked then, why our modern reasoners, who controvert this point without the abilities of a Cicero, pride themselves in supporting tenets, so opposite to the avowed sentiments of this great philosopher ? The only superior advantages, which they can have a right to claim, are such, as are derived from the clear and instructive precepts of Revelation. But do these weaken our trust in God ? Do these teach us to deny the existence of a national providence ?

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With respect to REVELATION, the jewish History is a detail of the constant interpositions of God, in order to impress upon the minds of his chosen people a due sense of obedience to his commands ; and lest it should be thought, that these interpositions extended no farther than that nation, we find the fate of several other kingdoms sometimes foretold, and the prophecies fulfilled, when they were not immediately connected with the Jews : so that, while the jewish prophets were the means of declaring their own people to be under the particular direction of God, they proved, that his providence had also a more extensive operation.

THE publication of the christian system afforded likewise a most striking instance of divine interference in human affairs ; and our blessed Saviour, although rewards and punishments in a future state were the great sanctions of his religion, evinced, in the

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strongest manner, the certainty of temporal and national visitations, by his remarkable prediction concerning Jerusalem.

THESE SEVERAL TESTIMONIES, relative to the overruling providence of God, appear to be incontestable; and they are greatly illustrated by various events in our own, as well as other histories. But the investigation of these events would detain us too long from the particular application of this doctrine, which our present humiliation requires.

EVERY individual under the pressure of adversity, who hath not lost the true sense of his situation in this world, is naturally induced to enquire, whether he is duly thankful for the blessings conferred upon him, and employs the talents, committed to his trust by a beneficent father, to the ends, for which they were

were designed. If the evil be of more general import, and the welfare of the community be involved in it, will not an enquiry of the same tendency, tho' of greater extent, suggest itself? And hence are derived those reflections, which teach us, that it must be highly agreeable to the Creator, as well as Judge, of all men, to receive the united acknowledgments of his creatures; and to see all inferior and worldly considerations giving place to a diligent and conscientious attendance in those houses, 'where his honour more immediately dwelleth.' This is the surest proof, that religion flourishes among us; that virtue is encouraged and practised; and consequently, that we are employing the talents, committed to our trust, to the ends for which they were designed. It is, indeed, the only public testimony that we can give in favour of religion; and when a public testimony is omitted, there is not much room to think, that a private one will ever take place;

place ; and if it did, it could not, for many reasons, be attended with the same beneficial consequences.

Now, when we perceive the justness of this reflection, can we avoid bringing it home to our own bosoms, and discovering, how little influence it hath upon our conduct ? An evident neglect in our public devotions, with our many vices and transgressions, which are, perhaps, principally to be ascribed to it, seems to have called down the divine displeasure upon us ; and to have produced that diminution of social and political blessings, which we feel so sensibly at present. For, beside the civil commotions, which have so long disturbed our peace, we are now engaged in hostilities with most bitter and implacable foreign enemies.

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AND although it may be thought, that the imputation of perfidy hath been by nations in general too freely fixed upon their formidable antagonists in war, yet surely the conduct of those, with whom we are contending, must ever receive this sentence from the impartial judgment of future ages. After having, twice within the present century, fomented and encouraged a rebellion in our island, in favour of a family most justly as well as legally excluded from the throne of these realms, and having supported and deserted that family, as it suited their own purposes; they have again, under the influence of the same detestable policy, directed their keenest arrows against the internal peace and prosperity of this empire; at a time, too, when they boast of most enlightened minds, and the utmost refinement of polished manners.

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It should be remembered, however, that these accomplishments derived their merit, and were at first approved and admired, because they were supposed to represent a benevolent, friendly, and sympathizing heart. Better, surely, would it be, that the specious garb were wholly removed, than that it should be suffered to conceal so bright and amiable a principle; which is necessary to the production of what humanity, philosophy, and religion ever dictated; an intercourse of kind, not malevolent offices; of real, not pretended affection, subsisting between the different nations of the earth.

It is impossible not to lament, that there are so many obstacles to the effectual prevalence of this pacific sentiment, and not to be desirous of exerting ourselves to the utmost, in order to remove them. To this end, therefore, since we find that this state of
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general peace (which all civilized countries respect in theory,) is often interrupted by God, as a means of punishment for general transgression, great endeavours toward reformation seem necessary from us, as well as from the neighbouring kingdoms, tho' not, perhaps, entirely of a similar kind. Amidst the universal censures upon our enemies, we are not to forget our own situation, or to be blind to our own failings; and neither the flagrancy of their public offences, nor the striking licentiousness of their manners, ought, in the smallest degree, to shake our belief in the supreme Governor of the world. These their iniquities do not at all lessen the probability of their being employed as instruments to humble us. The Babylonians, at the era of the jewish captivity, were inferior to the Jews in morality, and the most horrid and unparalleled crimes stain the roman annals, about the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. But as these events had been fore-
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told, there can be no room for thinking, that they were not directed by the immediate hand of God. They evidently were so: to the Jews much had been given, and of them therefore the more was required.

WE too have had our peculiar blessings: an establishment in religion, most conformable to the true spirit of christianity; a constitution of government, the envy and admiration of the world; and, at the close of the last war, political and commercial advantages, superior, perhaps, to what any country ever enjoyed. But what have been the fruits of all these distinctions? We have condescended to learn vice and infidelity from that enemy, whose civil dominion we had so nobly withstood. Political affairs have exhibited a constant scene of dissension; and the extent of our eastern commerce hath furnished instances of the most cruel plunder and rapine abroad; of unexampled luxury and dissipation at home.

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Is it, then, an argument of weakness or timidity to suppose, that our heavenly Father should visit us for the many perversions of his blessings ; or a want of candour to impute the ‘ evil that hath come upon us,’ to the most flagrant abuses of our christian liberty ? What he delights in, must be virtue, must be in some measure adapted to the purity and goodness of his nature. If our lives, then, are spent in such idle and unprofitable pursuits, as in no degree contribute to the furtherance of the objects, which he must ever have in view, can he approve our vanity ? If our actions seem in many respects to militate against his heavenly purposes, and those powers of reasoning, which ought to be employed in promoting his glory, are perverted to vilify and debase it, must he not condemn our presumption ? And can we, under these circumstances, urge any well grounded pretensions to his favour ; to the favour of that providence which is ‘ our shield and buckler.’

buckler,' and ' teacheth us to live in peace ;' of that providence, which is alone able, upon just and necessary occasions, to lead us forth with success to battle ; which ' maketh our hands to war, and our fingers to fight?'

LET us, then, consider these things with that seriousness which their importance demands. The formidable confederacy now armed against us, seems to have made a deep impression upon our minds : God grant that the soil, thus far prepared for cultivation, may receive the good and true seed, and bring forth an increase worthy of it ! And if any events, favourable to our cause, should give us confidence, in opposing our temporal enemies ; may they operate also upon us with the same tendency, in resisting the powerful influence of vice ! So that we may ever manifest the good effects of this awful admonition, by being grateful

ful to our God, just to our neighbour, and faithful to our country. Neither our duty to our country, nor to our neighbour, can ever be truly discharged, unless built upon a due sense of our duty to God.

PRIVATE friendship, or the love of individuals, it is said by writers upon that subject, can only be genuine, when founded on virtue, and regarding virtue as its object: public friendship too, or the love of the community, can only be truly displayed upon the same principles. It is, therefore, a most fatal error to allow ourselves to be actuated by motives in our public, which we should reject with disdain in our private conduct. ‘ Can the Ethiopian change his skin ?’ Can vice cease to be vice ? Can corrupt and self-interested motives of action ever properly assume the merit due to honest intentions ?

IN whatever sphere of life we act, if we lose that awful sense of God and of our dependence upon him, in which the essence of the religious character consists, we shall soon find a want of support. We shall 'reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man;' whilst 'they, that trust in the Lord, shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.' Whether, therefore, we regard our public or private conduct, our political or personal safety, the advice of Solomon always presents itself to us, pertinent and adapted:

'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.'

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